
The Vital LST

The Tank Landing Ship (LST), which proved so crucial to UN success at Inchon, was developed during World War II to deploy tanks, vehicles and critical supplies directly onto assault beaches soon after infantry troops stormed ashore. The ships used a ballast system that allowed them to operate effectively on the open ocean, in shallow coastal waters and on the beach. The LST had a 328-foot length and 50-foot beam and could carry a 2,100-ton load. These ships were the stars of many World War II amphibious operations, and their crews proudly served in them; but because the LSTs could only muster 10 knots of speed, sailors sometimes referred to them as “large, slow targets.”

Because of defense cutbacks, by January 1950, only 135 of the 1,051 LSTs America produced during the war remained in commission worldwide. The Shipping Control Administration, Japan (SCAJAP), an occupation agency responsible for inter-island trade and the return of Japanese POWs from other parts of Asia, operated another 39 LSTs. A few others served the U.S. Army in Japanese waters.

Soon after the sudden outbreak of war in Korea, the Navy feverishly concentrated LSTs in Far Eastern waters. These vessels would be essential to the transportation of vehicles and supplies from Japan and to MacArthur's amphibious operations in Korea. Vice Admiral C. Turner Joy, Commander U.S. Naval Forces, Far East, quickly pressed into service the SCAJAP and Army LSTs. Several of these ships were returned to Navy control in the summer of 1950 and were manned largely by reservists recalled to duty. Many of these ships were in a serious state of disrepair.

Lieutenant Erwin E. J. Hauber, Executive Officer of *LST* 799, described his former SCAJAP ship as overrun with “rats bigger than footballs” and stinking with the “penetrating odor of fish heads and urine.” The American sailors rearmed their LSTs with guns removed from frigates, which the Navy had provided to the Soviet navy in the World War II lend-lease program and the USSR then returned to U.S. control. Test firing these weapons was an adventure; some of the 20mm anti-aircraft guns failed to stop firing or “ran away.” One gunnery officer feared that a decrepit three-inch gun would explode, so he tied a 45-foot lanyard to the firing key.

The crews of the 17 American-manned LSTs and 30 Japanese-manned SCAJAP LSTs of Rear Admiral James H. Doyle's Task Force 90 performed small miracles to prepare their ships for Operation Chromite. For instance, when Lieutenant (jg) Leslie H. Joslin, MSC, was ordered to set up an operating room on board *LST* 898, the officer and his men turned to. Joslin's resourceful team scrubbed the small, filthy space assigned to them, brought on board a mountain of supplies, “scrounged” medicines from the Army and installed an operating table that they had removed from mothballed U.S. ships tied up at Kobe since World War II. Thanks to the ingenuity and plain hard work of American and Japanese sailors, when *LST* 898 and her sister ships departed for Inchon, they were ready for action.

The SCAJAP LST Q092 beached at Wolmi Do, 19 September 1950. Visually uninspiring, the Navy and SCAJAP LSTs were essential to the success of the Inchon landing.

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Amtracs carry elements of the 1st Marines toward Blue Beach as *LSMR 401*, positioned near Wolmi Do, fires five-inch rockets at enemy gun emplacements ashore.

Taking the Initiative at Blue Beach

Meanwhile, the assault on Blue Beach had gone better. First, several U.S. destroyers and the LSMRs raked Won-do and Tok Am, small bits of land flanking the approach route taken by the landing craft, and the British cruisers shelled high ground just behind the beach. Then, over 170 LVTs, including 18 gun-equipped armored amtracs (LVT(A)s) of the Army's 56th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, moved toward Blue Beach in 25 waves. The first wave, consisting of all the

LVT(A)s, crossed the line of departure at 1645. With the help of four guide boats manned by Navy UDTs, the first three waves made landfall where they were supposed to, although some of the LVT(A)s remained just offshore firing on the beach. Confusion, however, soon set in among the remaining waves. Established procedures called for 32 guide boats to direct a landing of this size, instead of the four available. Rain squalls and smoke from the fighting at Inchon spread across the

approach waters off Blue Beach, so succeeding waves could not guide on the first three. Visibility degenerated so quickly that the primary control ship could not even see the landing area. In addition, unanticipated crosscurrents threw many of the amtracs off course.

A number of the more experienced amphibious warfare officers realized that a disaster could occur if they did not take bold action. One such Marine, Major Edwin H. Simmons, a veteran of World War II Pacific land-

ings, grew concerned when the LVT in which he was embarked cut across several boat lanes. Simmons pulled out his map, sought out the LVT driver, and asked him if he had a compass. "Search me," replied the Marine, a recently recalled reservist, "six weeks ago I was driving a truck in San Francisco." Many of the other amtracs were manned by inexperienced crews and because the craft had been hastily pulled out of storage some lacked radios and other essential equipment.

Despite these handicaps, company-grade Navy and Marine officers took the initiative to restore order and put the troops ashore at the best locations. Even though the amtracs landed most of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, two miles to the left of their

designated beach, others disgorged their passengers close to intended landing areas near the sea wall. Thirty minutes after H hour, the units at Blue Beach started moving inland.

For a second time that day, the senior UN commanders decided they needed a closer look at Inchon. In the fading daylight and with mortar rounds exploding in the water nearby, Admiral Struble's barge brought Generals MacArthur, Shepherd and Almond alongside the sea wall at Blue Beach. A Marine noncommissioned officer belted, with characteristic directness, "Lay off, you stupid bastards! We're going to blast a hole in the wall!" With equal vigor the coxswain retorted, "*This is Admiral Struble's barge!*" The leatherneck responded,

"I don't give a shit whose barge it is, get it clear before I blow the sea wall!" An amused Struble directed the coxswain to back off immediately. Thirty seconds later, a large section of sea wall was blown sky high.

Meanwhile, the Marines at Blue Beach pressed on toward their objectives. On the right flank, an LVT silenced a machine gun nest in a tower 500 yards inland and the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, seized several commanding hills and forced an NKPA company to flee their well-prepared positions on Tok Am. On the left flank, the regiment's 2nd Battalion killed 50 NKPA soldiers, captured another 15 and secured the large hill east of Inchon, at a cost of 1 Marine killed and 19 wounded.

A Night in Inchon

Marine reinforcements also headed for Green Beach in the twilight. Inchon's severe currents swept off course some of the underpowered amphibious trucks, or DUKWS, which carried the 105mm guns of the 11th Marines's two howitzer battalions. By 2150, however, all of the "ducks" had waddled ashore and the artillerymen had registered the guns to fire in support of the infantry. After these units came two Marine armored companies, equipped

with Pershing tanks, which rumbled across the causeway and prepared to push toward Kimpo and Seoul.

During the night, *Lyman K. Swenson* and other destroyers and cruisers of the bombardment force fired star shells over the Red Beach perimeter so that the Marines could detect enemy movement. Not all sightings, however, resulted in combat. In the light of one illumination round, Captain Ike Fenton, who was relieving himself at the time, reacted

with surprise when a heavily armed enemy soldier emerged from a hole at his feet. Instead of attacking the startled American officer, the North Korean bowed deeply and surrendered his weapon.

Throughout the night, Navy surgeons and corpsmen of the 1st Marine Division and medical personnel in the LSTs at Red Beach tended the wounded, whose numbers were far below the 300 projected by Doyle's staff. The joint task force suffered 174 wounded in action and 14



Navy Seabees (left to right) Electrician's Mates Troy Edwards, Julian Perez and Joseph D. Edson install floodlights on Red Beach at night on the 15th so that naval forces can sustain their critical over-the-shore logistics operations.

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nonbattle injuries. The improvised operating room set up by the surgical team in *LST 898* treated only 42 military and 32 civilian cases. One man was missing and another 21 had been killed in action.

As 15 September ended, it was clear to all that the landing had succeeded. The joint task force had sustained

relatively few casualties and lost only two planes (whose pilots were recovered). General Shepherd, a veteran of many landing operations, credited much of this success to the Task Force 90 commander: "Doyle is a great commander and is the best amphibious naval officer I have ever met."

Objective: Seoul

UN forces were now firmly ashore, but the seizure of *Inchon* was only the opening phase of the campaign to cut off the North Korean Army and liberate South Korea. The next step was to capture Seoul, whose

military, political and psychological importance was paramount. Critical to this effort was the fleet's ability to keep pumping reinforcements, transportation resources, ammunition, fuel and supplies into the ever-

expanding beachhead.

By the time the *LSTs* backed off Red Beach with the rising tide on the 16th, the men of Naval Beach Group 1 and the Marine Shore Party Battalion had unloaded 4,000 tons of sup-

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Two days after the initial assault at *Inchon*, Seabees unload attack cargo ship *Alshain* (AKA 55) landing craft onto the pontoon dock built by the naval constructionmen at Wolmi Do.

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